

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Favorable reconsideration of this application in light of the following discussion is respectfully requested.

Claims 4-6, 10-12, 16 and 32-46 are presently pending in this application.

In the outstanding Office Action, Claims 4 and 32-34 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(e) as being anticipated by Ichikawa et al. (U.S. Patent 6,984,253); Claims 5 and 6 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Ichikawa et al.; and Claims 10, 16, 35-41 and 44-46 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Ichikawa et al. in view of JP 2000-102709 (hereinafter “JP ‘709”). However, Claims 11, 12, 42 and 43 were indicated as including allowable subject matter.

First, Applicants acknowledge with appreciation the indication that Claims 11, 12, 42 and 43 include allowable subject matter. However, Claims 11, 12, 42 and 43 are presently maintained in their respective dependent forms, because Applicants believe that Claims 4, 10 and 16 are allowable based on the following discussions.

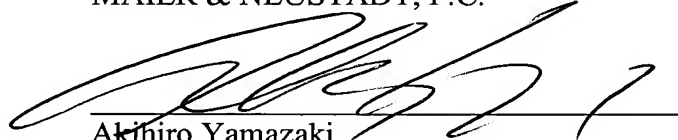
Regarding the rejections based on Ichikawa et al., it is respectfully submitted that the 35 U.S.C. §102(e) date of Ichikawa et al. is believed to be July 3, 2003 (§371(c)(1), (2), (4) date), and thus the effective U.S. filing date of the present application, which is February 5, 2003, disqualifies Ichikawa et al. as an effective 35 U.S.C. §102(e) reference. Also, the effective U.S. filing date of the present application, which is February 5, 2003, predates the PCT publication date of Ichikawa et al., April 24, 2003. As such, it is respectfully requested that the outstanding Office Action based on Ichikawa et al. be withdrawn.

For the foregoing reasons, Claims 4, 10 and 16 are believed to be allowable. Furthermore, since Claims 5-6, 11-15 and 32-46 depend directly or indirectly from one of Claims 4, 10 and 16, substantially the same arguments set forth above also apply to these dependent claims. Hence, Claims 5-6, 11-15 and 32-46 are believed to be allowable as well.

In view of the discussions presented above, Applicants respectfully submit that the present application is in condition for allowance, and an early action favorable to that effect is earnestly solicited.

Respectfully submitted,

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Akihiro Yamazaki', is written over a horizontal line.

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